

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* added a new reading initiative to the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*—the Early Reading First program. It addresses the concern that many children enter kindergarten without the necessary literacy foundation to enable them to succeed in school. In fall 2009, the United States Department of Education awarded an Early Reading First grant to the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) to implement the *Montana Partnership for Early Literacy* (MTPEL). OPI planned on implementing MTPEL in 23 classrooms, located in five sites throughout Montana, from January 2010 through May 2012. MTPEL has four goals:

1. All participating children will graduate with high achievement levels in language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and classroom skills necessary to participate effectively in elementary school and to become proficient at reading.
2. All classrooms will contain the materials (instructional, play) and spatial arrangements (e.g., centers) that will support the development of children's language and early literacy skills.
3. All teachers will achieve high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices through timely, targeted, sustained, and intensive professional development on children's acquisition and use of language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness. Teachers' instructional proficiencies are applied both to (1) children making satisfactory progress, and (2) children for whom progress monitoring identifies the need for intervention in a Response to Intervention (RTI) process.
4. All children and families will transition successfully into K-3 programs aligned with scientifically based reading research (SBRR).

To attain these goals, MTPEL combines two SBRR programs—*Opening the World of Learning* (OWL) and *Language for Learning* (LFL). These two curriculums form the core reading program (Tier I) in which all children participate. Based on a RTI model, children not performing at anticipated levels receive additional supports in Tier II or Tier III.

The RTI model is supported by the administration, analysis, interpretation, and use of data from a variety of screening, progress-monitoring, and outcome assessments, including the *Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test 4* (PPVT), *Test of Preschool Early Language* (TOPEL), *Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening* (PALS), and *Get it, Got it, Go!* Additional data on the classroom environment and instruction are gathered from the administration of the *Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation* (ELLCO) and the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System* (CLASS).

In conjunction with a comprehensive educational program in the classroom, additional programming is available to increase MTPEL children's preparedness for reading and kindergarten. Family members are invited to participate in parent literacy events that aim to improve parents' ability to communicate with their children, build language, and support their children at home. In addition, MTPEL works through the preschool centers to strengthen activities around the transition of children to kindergarten, and with the local education agencies to ensure alignment exists between the preschool and kindergarten curriculums.

Attention is also focused on improving the English language acquisition of MTPEL's English language learners (ELLs) who are primarily members of American Indian tribes and who attend school in an area on or near an American Indian reservation. In addition to participating in instruction in a culturally responsive classroom, MTPEL staff members are trained in *Structured English Immersion*, a program that incorporates principles of *Specifically Designed Academic Instruction in English*. A second population targeted in the grant is special needs children; implementation of the RTI model addresses this focus.

An array of professional development opportunities, including summer and winter institutes, site-based training, coaching, professional learning communities, undergraduate/graduate coursework, and portfolio development, are provided to MTPEL teachers, coaches, center directors, teacher assistants (TAs), and parents.

In fall 2010, OPI contracted with Education Northwest to provide a comprehensive evaluation of MTPEL. The evaluation addresses the extent to which implementation of its Early Reading First grant enabled it to meet its goals. The evaluation relies on a mix of methodologies to answer the evaluation questions. These include the analysis of child assessment and classroom observation data, classroom observations, the administration of surveys and staff member interviews, and document review.

Participation

From fall 2010, and continuing through August 2011, at least 70 teachers, TAs, coaches, and center directors participated in MTPEL, across five sites and 25 classrooms. These center staff members interacted with at least 415 children enrolled in MTPEL classrooms from September 2010 through June 2011. The majority of these children will attend kindergarten in fall 2011 (62%); almost half of the children were American Indian (47%) and 15 percent received special education services. Two-thirds of the children (n=262) were identified as participating continuously from September through May/June (as evidenced by having fall and spring test scores).

To What Extent Did MTPEL Accomplish Its Goals?

The following summarizes achievements in grant implementation.

MTPEL used Early Reading First funding to support staffing, professional development/training, and materials.

The project used four staff members to fulfill five roles—a Project Director who oversaw all aspects of the grant; two Early Reading First Specialists who provided professional development and technical assistance to all teachers, teacher assistants (TAs), coaches, and center directors; a Data Coordinator who was responsible for overseeing the team that administered the child assessments and classroom observation protocols; and a Family Coordinator who was responsible for implementing the family literacy and kindergarten transition plans. Assisting these four staff members were hired consultants who also provided professional development and technical assistance. Together, these staff members supported professional development offered off-site at institutes and center director and coach meetings, and on-site through coaching from Early Reading First Specialists and consultants.

In addition to the MTPEL staff members and consultants, five center coaches worked with center directors and with teachers and TAs in their classrooms. Coaches supported staff members by leading

staff and coaching meetings, assisting in the classroom, and conducting formal and informal classroom observations.

Early Reading First funds continued to provide SBRR curriculums for implementation in 25 extended-day classrooms throughout the 2010–2011 preschool year, as well as family literacy kits for the 400+ children receiving instruction in the program.

MTPEL provided professional development content in a variety of areas.

From fall 2010 through August 2011 MTPEL offered professional development content in a variety of areas. These included:

- Curriculum implementation of OWL and LFL and the development of cultural break units
- RTI, and data collection, analysis, and use by teachers to inform instruction and grouping, and by coaches to inform coaching and the development of teacher portfolios
- Phonological and phonemic awareness, oral language development, and vocabulary
- *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*
- Family literacy and *Dialogic Reading*
- Kindergarten transition

Center directors and coaches also received professional development on instructional leadership and conducting walk-throughs, coaching, and roles and responsibilities. Teachers and coaches learned about working with young children regarding child development and meeting a child's socio-emotional needs. They also learned about behavior management and positive guidance. The needs of ELLs and children receiving special education services were also addressed.

MTPEL participants attended professional development that would allow them to attain the high levels of instructional proficiency required for children to effectively participate in elementary school and become proficient in reading.

Through off-site and on-site professional development formats, a significant amount of professional development was provided. The vast majority of teachers participated in the summer and winter institutes and many TAs participated in the summer institute. Coaches and center directors also attended these institutes, as well as additional meetings in Great Falls geared specifically towards them. In addition, on-site coaching reinforced and supported implementation of the professional development provided off-site. Early Reading First Specialists, consultants, and center coaches worked weekly, and, at times, daily, with teachers and TAs, in and out of their classrooms. On average, teachers were visited in their classrooms five times per month; the vast majority of these visits were conducted by coaches, followed by consultants, center directors, and Early Reading First Specialists. Overall, the professional development was well-received by the participants.

Families were supported to assist their children to effectively participate in elementary school.

MTPEL staff members worked with center staff members to support and enhance the family involvement activities already provided at their sites. MTPEL encouraged parents to participate in classroom activities, field trips, and family literacy events offered during and after the preschool day. At these events, family literacy kits were distributed to support parents in their efforts to teach their children at home. In addition to these family literacy events, progress was made in strengthening communication

between preschool staff members and those on the staffs of receiving elementary schools. Through implementation of the MTPEL Kindergarten Transition Plan, principals and kindergarten teachers were introduced to the MTPEL program. In addition, some parents participated in a kindergarten orientation and/or met their child's kindergarten teacher.

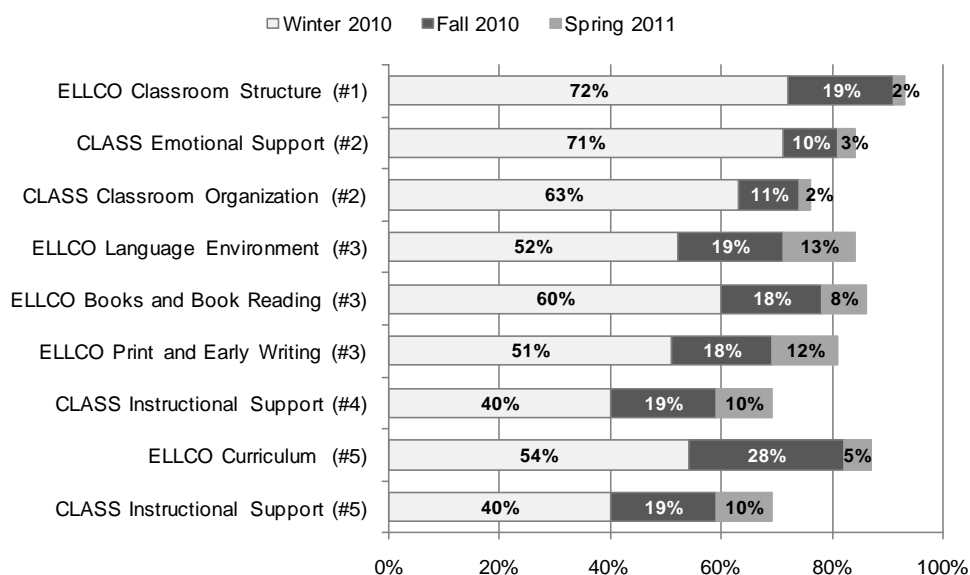
Teachers are on their way to achieving high levels of instructional proficiency with research-based practices, and classrooms are on their way to containing the materials (instructional, play) and spatial arrangements (e.g., centers) that will support the development of children's language and early literacy skills.

MTPEL is making progress helping participating teachers incorporate six standards of effective teaching practice into their teaching repertoire. Analyses of ELLCO and CLASS observation data (data used to evaluate growth in these areas) showed that from winter 2010 to spring 2011 growth occurred in five areas:

1. Teachers are establishing rich and engaging physical learning environments (ELLCO Classroom Structure).
2. Teachers are supporting children's abilities to attend to instruction, persist with difficult tasks, cooperate with peers and adults, and use language to solve problems (CLASS Emotional Support and Classroom Organization).
3. Teachers are supporting the development of young children's language and early literacy skills throughout the day, using intentional, playful, and engaging instruction (ELLCO Language Environment, Books and Book Reading, and Print and Early Writing).
4. Teachers are supporting the development of young children's higher order thinking skills, understanding of the world, and the way things work (CLASS Instructional Support).
5. Teachers are creating environments and differentiated instructional opportunities that meet the needs of diverse learners (ELLCO Curriculum and CLASS Instructional Support).

This progress is displayed in Figure ES-1, which shows the percentage of the total score for each measure attained by the project in winter 2010 and subsequent gains from winter 2010 to spring 2011.

Figure ES-1



Progress on Attaining Five Standards of Teacher Practice, Changes in ELLCO and CLASS Data

This year, significant growth was made in eight dimensions of the CLASS and ELLCO. Classroom scores increased in the areas of Extended Conversations, Efforts to Build Vocabulary, Quality of Feedback, Language Modeling, Books for Learning, Approaches to Book Reading, Support for Children’s Writing, and Concept Development.

Interview data were used to evaluate the sixth standard:

6. Teachers use information and data from a variety of sources to understand children’s instructional needs and to improve teaching and learning for young children.

Early Reading First Specialists reported that there was a strong focus in professional development this year to help teachers understand the data from the classroom observations and use it to change their practices in the classroom. Furthermore, center coaches reported that teachers were using assessment and progress-monitoring data, “data templates,” and “gains charts” to inform instruction for the children in their classrooms.

Teachers’ instructional proficiencies are being applied both to children making satisfactory progress, and children for whom progress monitoring identifies the need for intervention in a Response to Intervention (RTI) process.

A strong foundation for providing Tier 1 instruction has been supported, and, according to coaches, teachers have been successful in implementing OWL and LFL. Teacher’s instructional proficiencies were being applied to children making satisfactory progress, as, in most assessments, the vast majority of the children who were at benchmark in the fall were also at benchmark in spring. Likewise, teacher’s instructional proficiencies were being applied to children identified for intervention in a RTI process, as, in most cases, at least two-thirds of the children not meeting benchmark in the fall, found success by spring.

Results from the achievement gap analyses indicate that MTPEL was successful in closing the achievement gap for children receiving special education services. American Indian children continued to fall further behind their white peers in the areas of oral language, print knowledge, phonological awareness, name writing, upper-case alphabet recognition, and letter sounds skills.

Many participating children graduated with high achievement levels in language, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and classroom skills necessary to participate effectively in elementary school and to become proficient at reading.

According to analyses of PPVT, PALS, and TOPEL child assessment data, the majority of children age-eligible to attend kindergarten in *fall 2011* met benchmark in the areas of receptive language (85%), expressive language (89%), phonological awareness (77%), print knowledge (70%), upper-case letter recognition (72%), knowledge of letter sounds (76%) and name-writing ability (85%).

Children age-eligible to attend kindergarten in *fall 2012*, had more variable progress. While the majority of these children met benchmark in the areas of receptive and expressive language (69% and 72%, respectively), fewer were doing so in the areas of print knowledge (57%), phonological awareness (55%), knowledge of letter sounds (41%), name-writing ability (29%), and upper-case letter recognition (24%).

It is unknown if the children and families who participated in MTPEL in the 2009–2010 school year transitioned successfully into K-3 programs aligned with SBRR.

During the second year of grant implementation, the kindergarten transition plan was not fully implemented. However, four of six factors identified in the grant that increase the likelihood of a child having a successful kindergarten transition have been achieved:

1. Children like school and look forward to going.
2. Children show steady growth in academic skills.
3. Parents and families are involved in their children's education.
4. Parents trust teachers to understand their children's needs and they value their efforts to promote their children's education.